

## A Community Resource Person

By | Sep 11, 2019

Government Higher Primary School (GHPS), Makapura, in the Lingasaguru taluk of the Raichur district was established in the year 1960. It continues to serve the educational needs of children from Makapura, Marali and Telekattu villages. The number of families in these villages stands at 120, 100 and 120, respectively. Makapura village, where the school is located, is dominated by Reddy, Lingayath, Kuruba communities. There are about five families belonging to the SC community and 25 families from the ST community. The school has a total student strength of 138 from grade I to VIII with an equal number of boys and girls. There are about 20 students from the SC and 30 from the ST communities in the school. Of the seven teacher posts sanctioned by the education department, three are vacant. Two guest teachers have been hired for the current academic year.

### Teacher Lakshmana and his background

Lakshmana Mote teaches the lower grades at GHPS, Makapura. He also teaches the Kannada language to higher grades due to the paucity of teachers. Hailing from the Rona taluk of Gadag district, he comes from a family dependent on agriculture. The family faced financial challenges in educating Lakshmana. His parents had to sell off every resource they had to pay for his Diploma in Education (D Ed) degree. Lakshmana successfully completed the D Ed degree and qualified in the teacher recruitment examination. He joined government service in the year 2008 and has been in this school ever since.

**Teacher:** Lakshmana Mote

**School:** Government Higher Primary School, Makapura, Lingasaguru Taluk, Raichur District, Karnataka

### As a classroom instructor

Lakshmana teaches Nali Kali classes. Nali Kali is a multi-grade setting adopted by all the government schools up to grade III. The Nali Kali encourages students to learn at their own pace. In his Nali Kali class, he has multiple groups which are involved in self-paced, self-learning activities. Lakshmana moves from one group to the other giving directions—instructing the students in one group, assigning exercises in another, evaluating and giving feedback in yet another and encouraging students to involve in a group-work in the next. The teacher is multi-tasking in the true sense of the word. The complexities, involved in a diverse classroom, fully come into life in his classroom.



*While Lakshmana corrects a student's writing, a student from another group seeks clarification.*

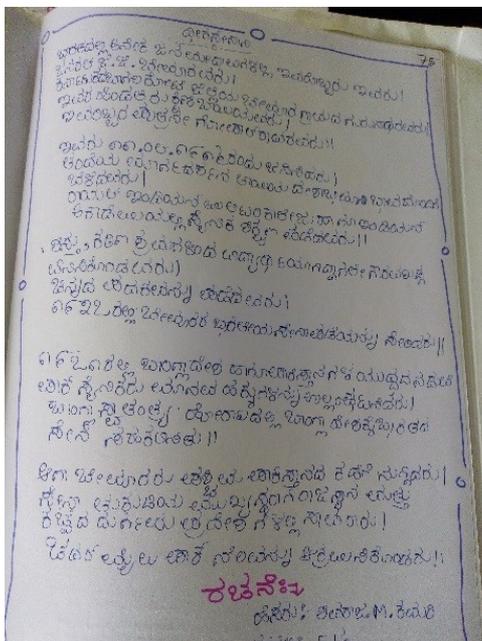
Lakshmana teaches Kannada from the early grades to grade VII. There are requests from the high school section for teaching Kannada. Occasionally, he obliges and helps the high school teachers in their Kannada lessons too. He is an expert teacher across all grades. He has developed his expertise by being a continuous learner. His education did not stop at the D Ed or because of joining services. Rather, he has earned his graduate degree while in service. He intends to continue his studies further.

#### **His vision of teaching and learning**

Lakshmana says that his Nali Kali teaching experience has helped him realise that children can learn well with a little guidance from the teachers. He believes that the Nali Kali methodology of teaching and learning facilitates knowledge construction among children. Nali Kali brings the everyday experiences of children to the classroom, which help children find the meaning in what they learn. Lakshmana cites an example of this from his class. Textbooks use the expressions 'nela ageyuvudu' to indicate an act of digging. But in the language spoken in this region, the expression used would be 'thaggu thoduvudu'. He understands the politics of language used in school textbooks and is fully aware of the debates and discussions around this issue in Kannada—the disconnect between the language spoken by the people and the language used in textbooks. He cites the example of novels by Devanooru Mahadeva to say that local realities are represented more appropriately in the colloquial language than in textual language. He also adds the argument by D N Shankar Bhatta that Kannada needs a grammar of its own. Lakshmana voices the need to include more texts using colloquial language in textbooks along with the textual language. Using only textbook language would make learning unidimensional, achieving the objective of teaching only the textual language to the masses. It does not mean that textual language should be neglected, he says. He cites the argument that since language diversifies after every twelve kilometres (approximately), it would be necessary to have a commonly understood language which could hold the culture together. There is a need for a common Kannada that everyone understands but which also accommodates regional diversities. Else, language diversity, which is a unique characteristic of Kannada could disappear. Since textbooks play a significant role in this, the textbook committee needs to take this initiative forward. He says, he encourages students to engage in their style of language in his classroom and outside.

#### **Learning beyond the four walls**

Lakshmana does not restrict the facilitation of student learning within the classroom. He uses every opportunity outside the classroom for this. He is the editor of the school magazine. It was given the title, 'Bala Baraha Sampada' (meaning, a collection of children's writings) for the year 2016 and 'Jenugoodu' (meaning, beehive) for the year 2018. This magazine is a compilation of students' writings. Lakshmana's role is to help the students identify topics, nature of writing, and ways of presentation. The magazine covers students' own writings, as well as, a compilation of materials from various sources. Lakshmana explains that this is an example of the students using their class learning to express their creative ideas.



A student's work in the school magazine

Various school programs like Teachers' Day, Children's Day, School Day and Sports Day are the other sources for students' learning. The school involves children in the programs not as spectators but as contributors. They learn to assume responsibilities. Lakshmana feels that these are opportunities to learn that schools can provide.

**Lakshmana, the school, and the community**

Lakshmana believes in the school as a system organized by the community with at least three purposes. One is to provide formal education to the younger members of the community, the second is to help them develop a balanced personality, and the third one is to develop 'samskara'.

Lakshmana believes that the role of the community towards young members is to be realized by providing role models. Classroom teaching and learning address the need for formal education directly. But along with it, schools need to include examples and illustrations from the immediate, as well as, the larger community. There are stories and legends that are part of the community, which can be used for enactment. He gives a recent example of play, 'Maha Sadvi Hemareddy Mallamma', that the girl students of the school enacted. The enactment not only provided an opportunity for students to showcase their abilities but to present Maha Sadvi Hemareddy Mallamma as a role model. He believes that such activities give students opportunities to reflect on their own goals in life. His role is in carefully selecting such ideals of utmost importance, he believes.

Other than the young members, the school has responsibilities for the rest of the community as well, Lakshmana says. He believes that school must take up the role of community development. There are many sections of the community that are neglected. Schools must take initiatives in this direction. He gives an example of how the school initiated a Women's Day celebration in the community. It was the first experience of its kind for the women of the community. Women participated in various competitions and fun activities and were happy

because the celebration was exclusively for them.

Lakshmana knows the community very well. His participation in the census survey was very helpful in achieving this. It not only provided an opportunity for him to understand the community in great detail but also gave an insight into inter-community relationships. His engagement with the community helped him to realize that members of the upper castes have become economically stable. Formal education reached them early and these families support the education of their young members. This is not the case among children from socially-backward communities. Not only do the children have to support families in livelihoods, these families do not have the time and resources to attend to the academic requirements of the school. Children from such background have to overcome multiple barriers. Lakshmana thinks that such students need additional assistance. The school gives special attention to such students.

A parent visited the school while we were in conversation with Lakshmana and we were privy to their interaction. Lakshmana counselled the parent of this student who had recently moved from Koppala and joined Lakshmana's school. He gave reasons for continuing in this school rather than sending the students back to the school at Koppala. Lakshmana later shared with us that the student would have otherwise discontinued school owing to the migration of parents. He seemed to have convinced the parent to let the child complete his schooling.

Lakshmana Mote is well aware of the faultlines within the community. He says that such faultlines get reflected in schools too. He gives an example of children from upper castes refusing to eat mid-day meals in the steel plates donated by members of SC community. It took a lot of effort on his part to convince them of the need for overcoming these differences. His effort included discussion on ideas of philanthropy, purity, and goodness. These interactions with the children have been helpful in overcoming discriminatory practices in the school.

His continued engagement with the community has helped him win over their hearts. This is his strength and he converts this strength for the development of the school. The school has been able to identify many contributors from the community who now support and sponsor many of the school activities.

### **Lakshmana, as a Resource Person**

With the experience of teaching from early grades to high school, Lakshmana is a seasoned teacher now. He has been identified as a Resource Person by the teacher community for various teacher development activities. He is a district-level Resource Person for Nali Kali training. He brings his knowledge and experiences to the teacher development programs that he is part of. His strong belief in individualized focus on learning and need for bringing in local knowledge in the learning process reflects in the experiences that he shares as part of the activities he conducts.

His focus in workshops has moved now on continuous comprehensive evaluation (CCE). He believes that the self-learning mode proposed in Nali Kali can be easily translated into continuous evaluation. He is aware of the challenges that teachers are facing while implementing CCE. He knows very well that there is some documentation requirement as a part of CCE, which make the teachers feel that the entire process (CCE) itself is not very useful. Lakshmana shares his story of using CCE successfully with teachers as a part of his workshop. He thinks this helps in convincing the teachers about its usefulness.

Lakshmana is extremely interested in studying local culture. As a part of this, he engages with cultural art forms. Here is an example of his engagement with 'Hanti Padagalu', Hanti songs which are sung during the harvest season in the locality.

Listen to the song

Listen to the song

Lakshmana is a resource person for the community, as well. His knowledge, fluency and command over language have been recognized by the community. They consult him while organizing any program. He has been a member of the organizing committee of many events in the community.

### Looking ahead

Lakshmana is fully aware of the opportunities as well as the challenges that come in his path. He knows that circumstances may not remain in his favour always. He cites the example of non-cooperation from his colleagues in organizing the School Day program. He mentions objections raised by a few community members against organizing sports in which girl students were participating. In another instance, he was dragged into trouble for taking part as a Resource Person in a department workshop. He has learnt, over time, that avoiding spontaneous reaction to challenges helps him to stay in control. It allows him to understand the situation and the reasons for the trouble. He remembers the support of his Head Teacher, Ravindra, at every stage. The Head Teacher shows complete confidence in Lakshmana's capabilities and initiatives.

Lakshmana is clear about what more needs to be done to make the school a better place. He intends to start 'Mojina Jathre', a fun fest in the school for the community members. Parents would be introduced to various academic activities and their significance, and; the role they need to play for children's academic success. This would communicate the expectations of the school from the community. It would be another initiative to take the school to the community.

Lakshmana is aware that despite his knowledge and skills, there is a lot more to be learnt from his colleagues. He is of the opinion that there have to be continued opportunities for interaction among teachers.

He also plans to continue his academic qualifications. He has started working on enrolling in a doctoral program. Such an initiation, the teacher believes, would help widen his understanding and help him grow professionally.

### Conclusion

This is the story of a school teacher working in a school in a remote village who is a Resource Person for the teacher community. His participation in state-level conferences speaks of his resourcefulness. His understanding of the community has helped him in helping students, teachers and the community, effectively. His activities and work reflect good teacher preparation on the one hand, and the motivation to contribute towards practice beyond the limited boundaries of classroom and school, on the other. These contributions have been recognised by the students, teachers and rest of the community, as well. His work with the community and the school to break the practices of caste discrimination have been successful inside the school. He now has the huge task of taking it forward at the community level.

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